

# SLIPPERY STONE

an inquiry into Islam's stance on music

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*to Muslim youth*

Beware the Pied Piper






## TRANSLITERATION KEY

ء (إِءْءِ)	' (a slight catch in the breath)	غ	gh (similar to French r)
ا	a	ف	f
ب	b	ق	q (heavy k, from the throat)
ت and ة	t (t has an "h" sound at the end of a sentence)	ك	k
ث	th (as in "thorn")	ل	l
ج	j	م	m
ح	h (heavy h, from deep within the throat)	ن	n
خ	kh ("ch" in Scottish loch)	ه	h (as in "help")
د	d (the hard "th" in "the")	و	w
ذ	dh (the soft "th" in "the")	ي	y (as in "yellow")
ر	r		
ز	z		
س	s		
ش	sh		
ص	ṣ (heavy s, from the upper mouth)		
ض	ḍ (heavy d, from the upper mouth)		
ط	ṭ (heavy t, from the upper mouth)		
ظ	ẓ (heavy z, from the upper mouth)		
ع	ʿ (like two a's from deep within the throat)		

ـَ	a (slightly softer than the "u" in "but"); an
ـِ	i (as in "in"); in
ـُ	u ("oo" in "book"); un
آ	ā (elongated a, as when you would stretch the "a" in "plastic")
أ	ā at the start of a word, 'ā in the middle (pronounced like اءِ)
و and ؤ	ū ("u" in "glue")
ي and ي	ī ("ee" in "feet")
ّ	stress symbol, indicated by repetition of letter

## Honorifics

	Glorified and Most High		May Allah's blessings and peace be upon him
	May peace be upon him	 , 	May Allah be pleased with him/her

هو الصفا الزلال لا يثبت عليه إلا أقدم العلماء

It (*samā'*) is a slippery stone; only the feet of the '*ulamā*' can stay firm on it.

— Quoted in *ʿAwārif al-Maʿārif* by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī

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## CHAPTER 1

# ISLĀM AND POETRY

GHINĀ' MEANS SINGING, AND TO SING YOU NEED something that can be sung. Quite naturally, poetry precedes singing. In case this simple point is not obvious to someone—like the devoted followers of Sigmund Freud—we may refer to sociologist Georg Simmel who says: "The source of vocal music is the spoken word, which is exaggerated by emotion in the direction of rhythm and modulation."<sup>1</sup> He argues that vocal music arises when plain language is felt inadequate to express powerful emotions like anger, joy, or mystical religious feelings.

Thus, we begin our inquiry into singing with an inquiry into poetry.

### Power of the Poet

It is generally known that poetry was the highest achievement and the pride of Arab society. Poets enjoyed roughly the same kind of power that is displayed today by the mass media. And nearly the same concern for truth and justice. An Arabic saying captured it

1. Georg Simmel (1882), "Psychological and Ethnological Studies on Music," in *Georg Simmel: The Conflict in Modern Culture and Other Essays*, trans. by K. Etzkorn (Columbia University Press: New York, 1968), 100. Quoted in Etzkorn, *Music and Society*, 12.